

CREATIVE JAPAN

MANGA ANIME GAMES ART FASHION FOOD LITERATURE ARCHITECTURE DESIGN TECHNOLOGY

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	03
MANGA, ANIME and GAMES	04
CONTEMPORARY ART	08
FASHION	09
FOOD	10
LITERATURE	11
ARCHITECTURE	12
DESIGN	14
TECHNOLOGY	15

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INTRODUCTION

All over the world, people have been focusing their attention on contemporary Japanese culture. Since the 1990s there has been a burst of creative energy in the fields of manga, anime, gaming, art, architecture, design, literature, food and fashion. This has now blossomed into a Japanese contemporary culture whose influence reverberates around the globe and which fascinates so many people, particularly from amongst the younger generation.

After the collapse of the “bubble economy”, Japan underwent a period of economic recession throughout the 1990s. However, in the world of popular culture, there was a constant flow of enormously varied and striking images and works from a group of Japanese creative artists. This cultural activity developed a dynamic of its own which enveloped not only the creators but also the consumers, and now, even at this very moment, is being given more overseas exposure. This phenomenon of recent years, which is in sharp contrast to the former exotic images of Japan as the land of Mt. Fuji, geisha and kabuki, is stimulating the formation of a new image of Japanese culture.

But let us look more closely at the historical background that gave rise to the perception among

young people of contemporary Japanese culture as “cool”. The truth is that subcultures have often arisen during the significant periods in Japanese history. As they matured, they went on to form a complex multi-layered culture. For instance, the tea ceremony became fashionable in the Azuchi-Momoyama period (1568-1600), while *ukiyo-e* prints were popular in the Edo period (1600-1867). These tangible and intangible cultural treasures were stored up as assets which, through being passed on to subsequent generations, have blossomed again in contemporary culture.

So what are the elements that constitute contemporary Japanese culture? Japan certainly absorbed culture from mainland Asia in ancient and mediaeval times. In modern times Japan absorbed culture from the West, and in the post-WWII era particularly from the USA. But we see our contemporary culture not only as absorbing elements from other cultures but also as interpreting them from a unique perspective, then re-shaping them into a new style and fusing them with something completely different. It is a culture in which the old and the new co-exist, one that appeals to the general

population and that anyone can enjoy.

And what about the character of the people who give form to Japanese culture? We were brought up surrounded by beautiful natural scenery and landscapes and from olden times have honed a sharp appreciation of beauty. We approach the creation of objects with a love for their beauty and, with a long tradition of diligence and dedication, go about the task of creation with an uncompromising stance: while striving for simplicity and the eradication of the superfluous, we do not neglect attention to the tiniest detail. At the root of this approach lies a spirit of harmony which is evident in our philosophy of co-existence with nature.

It is impossible to fully convey here the magic of contemporary Japanese culture, which draws on a creative tradition with unbroken links to the past. However, we offer this brochure in the hope that it will enable people from other parts of the world to gain a greater understanding and appreciation of Japanese contemporary culture.

A GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO MANGA, ANIME and GAMES



A worldwide movement

Nowadays, the term “manga” is used worldwide to refer to Japanese cartoons, as distinct from American comics or French *bandes dessinées*. Likewise, the term “anime” refers to Japan-produced animation as opposed to Disney cartoons or animation produced elsewhere. The 1990s saw the Japanese animated films *AKIRA* and *Ghost in the Shell* become popular among young people in North America, Europe and Asia, but it was also a period during which children and young people began to perceive Japanese pop culture as “cool”. In 2003, *Spirited Away*, directed by Hayao Miyazaki, won an Academy Award for best animated feature film. Moreover, *Pokémon*, the animated TV programme immensely popular among children, was shown in over 68 countries around the world, further enhancing its appeal. In consequence, the *Pokémon* market grew to 3 trillion yen in size (about US\$250 billion), of which 2 trillion yen was from overseas sales. The Japanese manufacturer Nintendo became a byword for home game machines, while shipments of the PlayStation and PS2, made by Sony Computer Entertainment, reached 100 million units each. Japanese pop culture, which includes manga, anime and games, and the market for them, clearly has the power to transcend national borders, languages and religious differences.

Manga for everyone

The foundations of modern Japanese manga and anime were first laid in 1959, with the simultaneous publication of such comics for young people as *Shukan Shōnen Magajin* (Boys’ Weekly) and *Shukan Shōnen Sandē* (Boys’ Sunday Weekly), and then in 1963 with the commencement of TV broadcasting of productions such as the animated series *Tetsuwan Atom* (*Astro Boy*) by the cartoonist Osamu Tezuka and *Tetsujin 28-go* (*Gigantor*), which was based on an original script by cartoonist Mitsuteru Yokoyama. Since then, the intimate relationship between manga and anime has continued, and even today over 60% of the animated cartoons produced are based on manga, with the cartoonists, manga publishers, animation production companies and the TV stations all in commercial partnership.





A plastic Pokémon character

In the 1980s, adults started to show an interest in manga and anime, which until then had been for children, leading to the launch of manga magazines for male adults. Similarly, a number of women's magazines were also launched in the 1970s and 1980s, adding to the series of girls' comics such as *Margaret* and *Shōjo Komikku* (Girls' Comics). The

market then underwent further subdivision into targeted categories, from infants to small children, girls, teenagers, businessmen, young women and housewives, each of them being offered a full line-up of magazines and products.

Media cross-fertilisation

In the animation market, creations such as *Space Battleship Yamato* and *Mobile Suit Gundam* appeared in the 1970s and evolved into a variety of forms, from TV animation to film, music and character-based products. This then led to the establishment of a market for toys given away as "freebies" with candy and plastic versions of favourite characters. Then in 1983, with the coming to market of the first home game machines, games themselves started to generate their own manga, anime, card game and character-product spin-offs in a kind of media cross-fertilisation. ▶



Neon Genesis Evangelion directed by Hideaki Anno

MANGA



Dragon Ball

Manga-related publishing of various kinds currently accounts for roughly 40% of the total Japanese publishing market. Manga are frequently used as original scripts not only for anime but also novels and TV dramas, and they often form the nucleus of media content. Since the 19th century, European and American satirical magazines, with their simple humour, and action films have been among the influences on manga. However, Osamu

Tezuka, who made his debut in 1946, launched a style identifiable as modern Japanese. He drew complex stories that hinted at Disney animation, Hollywood movies and Russian literature, in which the characters suffer and feel anger, and which sometimes end in tragedy, thereby transforming manga from simple entertainment into a thematically and artistically expressive medium.

From the '60s to the '70s, manga magazines saw explosive growth in the market, becoming another mass medium, with issue circulations running into the millions. The themes they tackled tracked the troubles of youth as the postwar baby boomers were growing up, and through this interaction a varied genre came into being to respond to the wide variety of readers' tastes, ranging from mysteries, fantasies, sports and human drama to history, politics and economics.

The complexity of manga stories is further bolstered by the originality of the characters. *Dragon Ball* (by Akira Toriyama), which achieved global popularity, is a boys' story of personal growth, as successive generations seek to gain strength in the world. The key theme is the process of growth. *Ranma 1/2*

(by Rumiko Takahashi), in which the protagonist changes sex on contact with water, refers to confusion about gender. In the cyberpunk science fiction *AKIRA* (by Katsuhiro Otomo) and in *Monster* (by Naoki Urasawa), a psychological-suspense series set in Germany after the

collapse of the Berlin Wall, straight entertainment co-exists with an artistic essence. In fact, there are many manga which appeal to a wide audience and which rival literature and film in their breadth. Avant-garde manga that appeared in the '60s, as well as the girls' comics of the '70s that mirrored the inner life of girls going through puberty, drew the attention of contemporary intellectuals and artists. In Japan today, manga is now a generalised genre with an expressiveness that has permeated throughout society.



Monster



Ranma 1/2 © Rumiko Takahashi/Shogakukan



The Tokyo International Anime Fair

A classic example of this trend would be the *Pokémon* characters painted onto an aircraft fuselage. Visitors from all over the world started flocking to Akihabara in Tokyo to visit this shrine to the Japanese pop culture market. The Tokyo International Anime Fair, which is held there every March, sees 100,000 visitors annually including overseas business customers.

Japanese domestic manga account for 28% of the total number of magazines published

domestically, or 18% of sales. Revenues that the Japanese anime industry receives from TV, film, DVD and Internet media run to about 250 billion yen annually. In addition, the retail market for character goods based on the characters in manga and anime has reached 1.61 trillion yen. The ripple effect it has caused is enormous: it is said that 60% of animation broadcast on TV worldwide is Japanese. Meanwhile, the domestic hardware and software home game market combined totals 400 billion yen, while about 1 trillion yen in games are exported.

Expanding markets

The impact of Japanese pop culture on the world is not confined just to the economy, the industry or the consumer markets. An even greater influence is exerted on the culture of its fans, the *otaku* (geeks or nerds, originally a term used to describe young



From bags to buses, *Hello Kitty* is a typical example of a *kawaii* product

people who stayed indoors reading comics or devoting their time to non-sporting hobbies), the comic market organisers and the fans who dress up in the costumes of their favourite characters. Fans passionate about manga and anime (the *otaku*) who emerged in the 1970s moved on from a specialised consumer culture collecting comics, animation software, music software and character goods to the formation of a fully-fledged community. In the manga field, amateur artists started to organise enthusiasts' buy-and-sell events on a nationwide scale. The most representative of

ANIME



Ghost in the Shell
© 1995 Shirow Masamune/KODANSHA-BANDAI VISUAL-MANGA ENTERTAINMENT

It is impossible to discuss Japanese anime without mentioning Hayao Miyazaki, Katsuhiro Otomo and Mamoru Oshii. These three were head and shoulders above their contemporaries in the 1980s and have been pioneers at the forefront of the animation world ever since. Miyazaki, while adopting the theme of living in harmony with nature, as exemplified by such films as *My Neighbour Totoro* (1988) and *Princess Mononoke* (1997), ultimately appeals to all generations through his use of expressive techniques which

are replete with all the thrills of an action movie. Otomo's *AKIRA* (1987), well-known for its intricate storylines, not only instigated a revolution in the contemporary domestic animation world for his complex plots and dynamism but also achieved massive popularity overseas. And Oshii, whose *Ghost in the Shell* (the cinema version was released in 1995) had an influence on the Wachowski brothers' film *The Matrix*, is a one-of-a-kind animator who brings out the pathology and conflict of a human society set in the near future.

Japanese anime are produced in large quantities, just as manga are, and for this reason there is plenty of scope for varied content and the freedom to decide what goes in them. This means that many anime strongly reflect the personality of the director. The depth of character of the participants, which is on a par with films and TV dramas featuring real actors and actresses, the dramatic quality of the stories and the artistic heights of the screenplay had already begun to sprout shoots in the 1960s, when modern anime

techniques were evolving. These traits have continued unbroken to the present. As demonstrated by anime such as *Hokuto no Ken* (*Fist of the North Star*, TV series 1984-1988), the source for many trendy quotable lines, *Sailor Moon* (TV series 1992-1997), the anime about a beautiful girl which started the *kosupure* (costume play) dress-up boom, and *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (the first cinema version was released in 1997), which had a cult following among young people because of its complicated storylines and technical jargon, anime frequently give rise to social phenomena which resonate in harmony with contemporary Japanese society.



Neon Genesis Evangelion

this trend, the comic market, started such an event in 1975 and it is currently held twice a year. It is now the biggest indoor pay-to-enter event in the world, with an average of 400,000 visitors every time.

Among the worshippers of Japanese pop culture, whose numbers now total in the millions around the world, the word *kawaii* (cute) has become common. It is a highly complimentary term to describe “cuteness” as used by young Japanese women for such characters as the *Hello Kitty* series. Young animators in Europe, the USA and Asia aim to incorporate Japanese-style animation into their work, while in Japan new businesses are emerging, such as one based on mobile phone mail messages incorporating pictographs, derived from keyboard punctuation characters, created by Japanese high school girls. Thus, pop culture emanating from Japan appears to be changing the ways in which humans entertain themselves and communicate on a global scale. It is effectively becoming a common global culture.

Global mass culture

It is sometimes said that the Japanese culture of manga, anime and games is simply a continuation



©Kozanji
Choju Jinbutsu Giga (Scrolls of Frolicking Animals and Humans)

of a tradition beginning with religious illustrated scrolls such as the *Choju Jinbutsu Giga* (Scrolls of Frolicking Animals and Humans) drawn in the 12th century and the *ukiyo-e* (woodblock prints) of the Edo period. However, the immediate roots of Japanese pop culture can be traced to the importation of overseas comics and animation after the period of modernisation in the late 19th century onwards, and particularly the period of the industrialisation of the anime and manga industry under the influence of the USA

GAMES

Nintendo’s launch of the Nintendo Entertainment System (NES; known as Family Computer, or Famicom, in Japan) in 1983 planted the seeds of success for Japan’s gaming industry. The console’s superior performance and ease of use resulted in almost 63 million shipments worldwide. This era also laid the foundations for such genres as action games (Nintendo’s *Super Mario Bros.*, for the NES) and role-playing games (RPGs, including *Dragon Quest* developed by Enix, now Square Enix). The 1990 release of the Super Nintendo Entertainment System (Super Famicom in Japan) sustained the momentum, spurring the creation of a wide range of gaming software.

The generation that grew up with these consoles formed the next wave of developers. Active in the early 1990s, they created the PlayStation with its high-quality graphics and enhanced processing power. They also focused on new genres such as 3D fighting games and rhythm action games. Japanese gaming software became popular in other countries because of its attractive characters (reflecting the impact of



©2007 NINTENDO, TM
Nintendo’s *Wii Sports*



Alpine Racer 3 for PlayStation2 (top) and *Formula One Championship Edition* for PlayStation3

Courtesy of SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT, INC.

manga and anime), the sweep of its virtual worlds and its appeal to a broad array of gamers, from beginners to serious players.

Starting with Nintendo’s Game Boy (1989), portable gaming consoles for children represent another major trend. Nintendo’s *Pokémon* software released for the Game Boy in 1996 was a huge hit, winning children’s hearts because it allowed them to raise and swap their own monsters. Together, domestic shipments and exports of Japanese gaming software exceed a combined 200 million titles annually. The release of next-generation consoles such as Nintendo’s Wii and Sony Computer Entertainment’s PlayStation3 in 2006 buoyed shipments in Japan and overseas.

Portable consoles such as the Nintendo DS and the PlayStation Portable (PSP) also remain very popular.

after WWII. This fact shows that cultures which transcend borders, languages and religions are the embodiment of a universal trend born out of contact with foreign cultures, much as globally influential impressionist art gained great inspiration from Japanese *ukiyo-e*.

From the 1960s, Japanese pop culture developed against the background of a society with mass media and mass production and consumption

markets. Subsequently, it evolved further with the second generation of post-war baby boomers and beyond, thanks among other things to digital communication technology such as the Internet. We are now witnessing a transformation of Japanese pop culture into the next generation of global mass culture. The supporters of Japanese pop culture will be children and young people from all over the world.

CONTEMPORARY ART



Tan Tan Bo, 2001 (acrylic on canvas mounted on board, 3600 x 5400 x 67mm)
©2001 Takashi Murakami/Kaikai Kiki Co., Ltd. All Rights Reserved. Courtesy of Tomio Koyama Gallery.

The foreign view of Japanese art has tended to focus on traditional aspects, as represented by Japonisme. However, exhibits at the Venice Biennale Aperto 1998 by artists including Tatsuo Miyajima and Yasumasa Morimura have spurred interest in contemporary Japanese art as well. Takashi Murakami has exerted a major impact on the USA and European art scenes with his concept of Superflat, developed from Japan's pop culture. He has produced

exhibitions featuring not only his own works but also those of Japanese artists from the late 19th century to the present day and incorporating manga, anime, *shokugan* (Japanese giveaway candy toys) and fashion. While stretching the boundaries of art in this way, he has expanded into producing marketable works.

Japan's contemporary art scene encompasses a broad range of artists working in different media. They include pop-culture figures Takashi Murakami and Yoshitomo Nara, photographer Hiroshi Sugimoto and painter Hiroshi Senju, whose works deal with seasonal change in the natural world and the artist's own sensibilities, and Tatsuo Miyajima and Yasumasa Morimura, who make seemingly casual yet clever use of the latest technology.

Takashi Murakami



And then, and then and then and then and then / Cream, 2006 (acrylic on canvas mounted on board, 1000 x 1000 x 50mm)
Courtesy of Galerie Emmanuel Perrotin, Paris & Miami
©2006 Takashi Murakami/Kaikai Kiki Co., Ltd. All Rights Reserved.

Takashi Murakami developed the style known as "Superflat". Characterised by traditional Japanese art's lack of depth – the works are flat, ignoring Western perspective techniques – Superflat is two-dimensional and planar, drawing on styles common to contemporary anime and manga. Superflat works exhibit values and concepts very different from those in Western art history. Murakami believes childishness, amateurism and the relatively small postwar income disparities in Japanese society have been sources of creativity in Japan's contemporary art scene. He is also known for his collaboration with luxury fashion house Louis Vuitton.

Hiroshi Senju



Falling Colour, 2005, and a fusuma painting at Daitokuji-Jukoin-Betsuin Temple

Painter Hiroshi Senju uses traditional Japanese techniques (blurring, gradation, blending) to portray the changing seasons as reflected in Japan's natural environment. His *Waterfall* series won the Venice Biennale Award of Excellence in 1995. In 2002 he completed a six-year project to paint 77 sliding panels for eight rooms in Daitokuji-Jukoin-Betsuin Temple in Shizuoka Prefecture.

Hiroshi Sugimoto



Al. Ringling, Baraboo, 1995 and Hyena-Jackal-Vulture, 1976 (gelatin silver print)
©Hiroshi Sugimoto / Courtesy of Gallery Koyanagi

Hiroshi Sugimoto is known for works exploring natural light and the passage of time, such as *Seascapes* (images of sea horizons around the world) and *Theaters* (extremely long-exposure images captured by opening the camera's shutter as a movie begins and closing it as it ends). He has recently produced fusions of photography with collections of old fine art.

Yoshitomo Nara



©2006 Yoshitomo Nara

The little star dweller, 2006 (acrylic on canvas, 2280 x 1820mm)

Pop artist Yoshitomo Nara has been active mainly in Europe. Exploring the Japanese concept of *kawaii* (cute), his internationally acclaimed works enjoy an established reputation. He is known for his idiosyncratic treatments of young girls with distinctive facial expressions highlighted by slanted eyes.



FASHION

Tokyo fashion is about young people. It isn't a luxury business, as it is in the USA and Europe. Luxury articles don't give status. It's the young people strolling in the streets who decide what appeals to them, and this trend then spreads among their like-minded peers. This youth-driven phenomenon is similar to how Mods and Punks created their own fashion in the London of the '60s and '70s. The difference is that young Tokyo trend-setters are not people angry at society, like the Punks, or people who use a style of clothing as a means of protest. In Tokyo, the girls want what's *kawaii* (cute), and both the boys and the girls want clothes that will make them the focus of others' attention.

In his *L'Empire des Signes* (1970), Roland Barthes wrote that Tokyo is a city with an "empty centre" of signs without meaning. Likewise, Tokyo fashion isn't about meaning. The girls treat Louis Vuitton bags as they would a Samantha Thavasa bag (an inexpensive domestic brand), because both seem very *kawaii* to them. When they tire of them, they move on to a new "cute" brand.

This is why Western designers are astonished when they visit Tokyo. Wearing fashionable or trendy clothes doesn't mean being rich or successful in Japan. It's not about prestige but about being young, free and sometimes innocent. In this market, there's no need to design clothes for mature and wealthy tastes. Foreign designers are

overwhelmed by the freedom. Leading Tokyo brands like Undercover, Green, Mintdesigns and A Bathing Ape aren't about prestige and class: they just want to make things young people will go for.

Rei Kawakubo of Comme des Garçons said in the early '80s that to create something new is to be youthful. Her brand faced barriers in the USA and Europe at the time because European critics commented that Comme would not suit mature women. Now the brand is coming to be acknowledged as a statement of Tokyo fashion.



Tokyo Street Style

<http://www.style-arena.jp/>



©Japan Fashion Association

- 1 + 2. Autumn and Winter 2007/08 Collection from Undercover ©UNDERCOVER
3. Tokyo Collection Week Spring 2007 ©Fashion Strategy Forum, HISUI 2007 s/s collection
- 4 + 5. Autumn and Winter 2007/08 Collection by Mintdesigns ©MINTDESIGNS
6. Collections from A Bathing Ape



Modern Japanese cuisine

Contemporary cuisine

Japanese cuisine is based on the enjoyment of a richly varied table offering a nutritional balance through a range of seasonal offerings. In doing so it reflects the Japanese people's discriminating approach to taste and ingredients and their readiness to explore the unfamiliar. While continuing to value their national cuisine, Japanese households also create local versions of foreign dishes: a homemaker will often prepare curry one day followed by pasta the next. The Japanese have an insatiable interest in food. Cookery experts and chefs will introduce recipes in the media, only to see suburban kitchens using them on the same day.

Japanese also enjoy a wide range of cuisines outside the home. Japanese cuisine alone offers many popular alternatives, from high-class *ryōtei*

(where parties dine in private rooms) and less-formal *kappō* establishments (modern restaurants where the chef prepares dishes facing



Ryōtei

his customers across a counter) to specialist restaurants offering sushi, soba noodles, yakitori (skewered chicken with vegetables) and tempura (deep fried batter-dipped seafood and vegetables) and casual *izakaya* (Japanese pubs serving food to accompany a range of beverages). In Japan it is not unusual for *kaiseki-ryōri* (fine cuisine served mainly at *ryōtei* using fresh seasonal ingredients cooked to highlight the original flavours and textures) to feature European ingredients and tableware, or for one *izakaya* customer to order a glass of champagne while another drinks *shōchu* (a traditional distilled spirit). Combining the pursuit of flavour with health considerations and a range of foreign table cultures, Japanese cuisine is an increasingly appealing palliative for jaded contemporary taste buds.



Kaiseki hors d'oeuvre

Traditional Japanese Cuisine

Beautifully presented *chakaiseki* meal

sensitive to even the subtle differences in taste between early and late spring. Serving dishes also play an important role. Changing with the seasons, they afford the cultured pleasure of choosing, for

Japanese cuisine involves the elegant presentation of delicate flavours and textures created from a refined sense of taste and varied seasonal ingredients. Using the maximising of awareness of seasonal elements as an art form, traditional Japanese cuisine is

example, a flower pattern to reflect a sense of enjoyment from tableware used only in the flower's blooming season.

These characteristics trace their roots to the *honzen-ryōri* (foods served in utensils on a legged tray) developed by the warrior class during the Muromachi Period (1333-1568) and the *kaiseki-ryōri* for the tea ceremony, formalised by tea master Sen no Rikyu in the Azuchi-Momoyama Period (1568-1600). Underlying them is the concept of gratitude to the meal's preparer and the living things that compose it. Japanese express this by saying "*Itadakimasu*" (I humbly receive this food) before beginning a meal.

Contemporary Chefs

Harumi Kurihara

Cookery expert Harumi Kurihara is extremely popular with all age groups. In 2005 she became the first Japanese to win Best Cookbook of the Year (for *Harumi's Japanese Cooking*, right) at the 2004 Gourmand World Cookbook Awards.



Published by Conran Octopus, London

Kunio Tokuoka



©Kyoto Shinbun

Executive chef and proprietor of the Arashiyama Kitcho restaurant, Kunio Tokuoka is Kyoto's foremost exponent of traditional Japanese cuisine, who adds a contemporary twist to tradition. He was feted in 2004 and 2006 at Turin's Salone Internazionale del Gusto food and wine fair in Italy.

Nobu Matsuhisa

Nobu Matsuhisa is executive chef and proprietor of the Nobu, Matsuhisa and Ubon creative Japanese restaurants around the world. He pioneered the globally popular "modern Japanese" cuisine.



Courtesy of Nobu restaurants

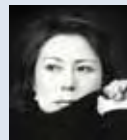
LITERATURE

Modern Japanese literature used to be divided into two broad genres: the “pure” – art for art’s sake; and the “popular” – easily accessible works with an emphasis on entertainment. Into the “pure” category fell conceptual works dealing with politics and ideology or refined aesthetics, such as those by Junichiro Tanizaki and Yasunari Kawabata. Their globally renowned novels often express a Japanese sense of beauty based on the notion, from mediaeval times, of life as being transient and evanescent.

However, the pure/popular distinction started to break down in the latter half of the 20th century, and today it is virtually impossible to place a novel firmly in one

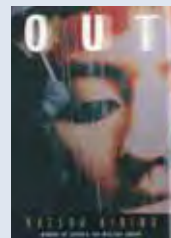
genre or another. The classifications of the literary world seem to mirror the vague divisions between “high culture” and “sub-culture” evident elsewhere in contemporary culture. This trend is also discernible in novelistic techniques, as pure literature adopts devices such as fantasy, fable and science fiction that would once have been almost inconceivable in this genre. In addition, globalisation has caught up with Japan’s literary scene, giving rise to a large number of novels that either do not emphasise or transcend the traditional lyric qualities of Japanese literature. These developments suggest that Japanese literature has for the first time taken on a global flavour.

Natsuo Kirino



Portrait
©Makoto Watanabe

Natsuo Kirino, who won an international reputation with *OUT* (1997), writes in a broad range of genre-transcending areas. Recent works include *Grotesque* (2003).



Published by Kodansha International

Yoko Ogawa



La Formule préférée du professeur
©Actes Sud 2005
Portrait
©Masaaki Toyoura

Yoko Ogawa’s novels typically deal with everyday life. However, she struck out in her own direction with her 2004 masterpiece *The Professor’s Favourite Formula* (translation of Japanese title; to be published in English by the end of 2007), Japan’s first literary work fusing literature with mathematics.



Published by Actes Sud

Miyuki Miyabe



Miyuki Miyabe is a popular science fiction, mystery and period novelist. Released in 2001, *Mohōhan* (The Copycat) is a major mystery work with a meticulously crafted plot treating various aspects of contemporary life. Other works include *Crossfire* (1998) and *Shadow Family* (2001).

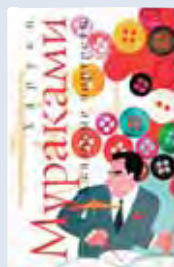


Published by Kodansha International

Haruki Murakami



Globalisation can undermine identity, resulting in a sense of emptiness and loss. Haruki Murakami’s novels, written in a dry style, portray this kind of contemporary society. Murakami was at university during the student activism of the late 1960s, and so is familiar with the succeeding period during which spiritual emptiness was pervasive. His works, which sometimes draw on the techniques of fable and science fiction, portray the difficulty of finding satisfaction in the business of living and the consequent need for kindness. Amongst his main works are *Norwegian Wood* (1987), *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle* (1994) and *Kafka on the Shore* (2002).



Examples of Murakami’s books translated into foreign languages
Courtesy of The Japan Foundation
Portrait ©Marion Ettlinger

ARCHITECTURE



© JINTO
Itsukushima Shrine, Miyajima, Hiroshima

Traditional Japanese architecture is characterised by wooden single-storey structures. Lacking a tradition of cave dwellings and stone walls, it was natural for the nation to develop this style. The traditional structure has not changed during recorded history, remaining intact after Buddhist architecture entered Japan from China and the Korean Peninsula in the mid-6th century. Even shrine architecture – widely regarded as having been stimulated by Buddhist architecture – retains the typical wooden single-storey structure.

Wooden construction basically combines posts and beams. If a large building is involved, the structure spreads on its horizontal axis by joining single-storey rooms. Although a massive structure is typically dark inside and is thus not always suited to some human activities, Japanese architectural methods cleverly allow light and breeze to penetrate: by opening to the outside, they link a building's interior with its garden.

Japanese architecture is also characterised by large, imposing roofs. This is because a Japanese building's horizontal axis and low profile make the roof the only indicator of its presence. Although crowning imposing buildings with suitably impressive roofs is widespread across Asia, the trend developed in Japan not because of climate (high temperatures and humidity) but to represent a building's existence symbolically.

Japanese dwellings were basically single-storey until the mid-19th century, when the influence of Western architecture saw Japanese start to live in two-storey and taller houses. This change also spurred architects to emphasize façades. The modern architectural movement in early-20th century Europe turned a new spotlight on Japanese architecture and its horizontal focus. European architecture had traditionally stressed the vertical axis through façades, but modernism marked the beginning of a twin vertical/horizontal development. Japan's horizontal axis was an awakening for the West.

The world thus rediscovered traditional Japanese architecture and its horizontal axis. One of the 20th century's most significant architects, Kenzo Tange (1913-2005), combined traditional Japanese architecture with modernism, using a traditional composition of columns and beams as if creating an abstract painting. His designs brought Japanese architecture's aversion to room divisions directly into modern architecture. Successors such as Fumihiko Maki, Arata Isozaki, Kisho Kurokawa and Yoshio Taniguchi designed buildings using horizontal and vertical axes as simple geometrical structural elements, thus fusing traditional Japanese with modern architecture. Today the succeeding generation of Toyo Ito and Tadao Ando continues to take Japanese architecture in new directions.



Sendai Médiathèque, Miyagi, 2001, by Toyo Ito

Contemporary Japanese Architects

Toyo Ito



Having worked for Kikutake Architects (the firm of Kiyonori Kikutake, a key figure in Japan's avant-garde Metabolist movement), Toyo Ito then established his own office (Toyo

Ito & Associates). Pursuing soft, translucent designs, his vision is best expressed in the Sendai Médiathèque (Miyagi, Japan), the TOD's OMOTESANDO Building (Tokyo) and the Cognac-Jay Hospital (Paris). Combining the column-and-crossbeam structure that is part of the Japanese tradition and the basis of modernist architecture with "floating" tube-steel lattice columns, his structures have won critical acclaim.

TOD'S OMOTESANDO Building, Tokyo, 1997 ©Nacasa & Partners





Langen Foundation, Rakettenstation Hombröich, Neuss, Germany, 2004
Courtesy of Langen Foundation photo: Tomas Riehle/artur, 2004

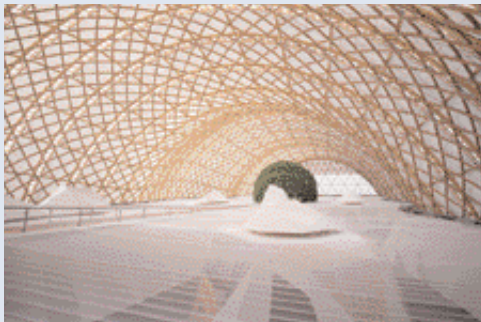
Tadao Ando



Tadao Ando is an indomitable figure. Lacking formal training, he began making designs while working as a boxer. He went on to establish a successful practice and to teach architecture at the University of Tokyo. Fusing walls and the concrete that is modern architecture's basic element with Japanese architecture, his structures can be seen in many countries. In Japan, his Naoshima Contemporary Art Museum complex (Naoshima Island, Kagawa, Japan) and Omotesando Hills (Tokyo) attract many visitors. Invoking traditional Japanese architectural methods in contemporary guise, Tadao Ando is now one of Japan's leading architects, succeeding Kenzo Tange.

Shigeru Ban

Cosmopolitan Shigeru Ban studied his art in New York. Using environment-friendly recycled cardboard paper tubes,



Japan Pavilion,
EXPO 2000,
Hanover, Germany
©HIROYUKI HIRAI

his innovative designs for relief housing for victims of the 1995 Great Hanshin Earthquake and for the UNHCR (the UN Refugee Agency) were acclaimed for harmonising with 21st-century concerns.



He has since enhanced his reputation with structures such as the Centre Pompidou-Metz (France) and the Nomadic Museum (New York). His work shows the path Japanese architecture needs to take as it reaches out to the world.

Kazuyo Sejima + Ryue Nishizawa / SANAA



Formerly with Toyo Ito & Associates, SANAA principal Kazuyo Sejima combines traditional and modern aspects of Japanese architecture. Her recent designs

such as the 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art (Kanazawa, Japan), Onishi Hall (Gunma, Japan) and *Bairin no Ie* (Plum Grove House, Tokyo) achieve the limits of freedom and translucency for which architecture strives.

Kazuyo Sejima and her young colleague Ryue Nishizawa are seen as important figures in the future of Japanese architecture.

21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Ishikawa, 2004
©SANAA



Jun Aoki



©Yoshiaki Tsutsui

Jun Aoki is the leading exponent of the practical fusion of avant-garde with commercial architecture. Although his predecessors (Toyo Ito, Tadao Ando) created wonderful commercial structures, Jun Aoki's designs brought modernist expression into commercial architecture from the outset. His Louis Vuitton stores in New York and Tokyo's Omotesando district showed contemporary Japanese architecture can design structures in all genres. His

Aomori Museum of Art (Aomori, Japan) offers a vision of how the architecture of the future should be expressed in public structures.



Louis Vuitton OMOTESANDO, Tokyo, 2004 (left) and Aomori Museum of Art, 2006
©LOUIS VUITTON/DAICHI ANO
©Aomori Museum of Art

DESIGN

Japan's product design has always closely mirrored current issues. An example is the nation's increasing environmental awareness and ageing population, factors that have to be taken into consideration in any account of contemporary Japanese society. This broad social backdrop to the field of design has given rise to the paradigms of "universal design", which seeks to make products as widely usable as possible, and "ecological design" incorporating environmental concerns. Japanese design is also characterised by whether products are *kawaii* (cute), emphasising their softness and gentleness.

This trend can be seen in a wide range of products in recent years, from notepads to cars. These products owe their existence to a combination of technological revolution – progress in digital technology and the fusion of this with traditional analogue technology – and the distinctive Japanese approach to craft, involving attention to detail, discrimination in selection of materials, the pursuit of functionality and efficiency, and conceptual flexibility. These factors have combined to produce refined designs that consider both the people using them and the natural environment.

Beauty and universality - *Mingei*

One influence on modern Japanese design was the *Mingei* (Folk Crafts) Movement as espoused by philosopher Muneyoshi Yanagi in the 1920's. The movement emphasised the pursuit of practical beauty as well as the universal appeal of everyday craftwork design. Moreover, its impact was not confined to Japan. For example, British potter Bernard Leach was greatly influenced by the movement. After studying under pottery master Shigekichi Urano, he set up the Leach Pottery in 1920 in St. Ives, Cornwall, UK, with Japanese potter Shoji Hamada. The Leach Pottery is currently being restored.



From left, Humidifier (PLUS MINUS ZERO CO., LTD.) by Naoto Fukasawa (Photo by Hidetoyo Sasaki) ; Lamp (ToFU) by Tokujin Yoshioka; tea set (Boga) by Kanaé Tsukamoto and Doughnut Table by Naoko Hirota

Naoto Fukasawa

Naoto Fukasawa is known for his simple, easy-to-use designs that cleverly anticipate the user's needs and integrate with the living space. They include the ±0 (plusminuszero) brand of household electrical appliances and a wall-mounted CD player for Muji.



Electronic Calculator, above, and headphones for Portable MD Player (PLUS MINUS ZERO CO., LTD.), right
Photo by Hidetoyo Sasaki (both)

Kanaé Tsukamoto

Kanaé Tsukamoto is highly acclaimed for her *Bitowa* lacquerware, which combines traditional



Japanese lacquer skills with novel design techniques. Her work reveals an original approach to materials.



©HIROSHI SUMATA

Containers (*Bitowa*), above, and *Chazutsu* (tea-leaf containers) treated with *urushi* (Japanese lacquer), left, manufactured by Wajima Kirimoto

Tokujin Yoshioka

Enjoying an international reputation for originality,



Tokujin Yoshioka has released a number of experimental designs, including the Media Skin mobile phone using soft materials to assimilate the phone to the human body, as well as the Boing and ToFU interior collections.

Media Skin, left, and PANE chair, above

Naoko Hirota

Discovering new sides to an object's function, while taking into account both cost and ease of



manufacture, are the essence of Naoko Hirota's product design. Her empathic sensibilities are ever present across a wide range of objects, from fashion accessories to furniture.

Naoko Double Zip, left, and Laptop Table, above

TECHNOLOGY

“Made in Japan” denotes precision, and leading-edge technology. Japan decided early on to invest in fostering such technology to combat global warming and is making headway in this challenging field.

Automotive technology to combat global warming

Because they burn gasoline, cars produce “gasoline waste” in the form of carbon dioxide, the major cause of global warming. In 1997 Toyota Motor launched the Prius hybrid car, which can run on either its gasoline engine or its electric motor and thus significantly reduce carbon dioxide emissions. The



Toyota Prius ©Toyota Motor Corp.

vehicle achieves spectacular fuel consumption of 20-25 km per litre in ordinary driving conditions. Motors, created in the 19th century, are an obsolete technology, one in which a power increase of only 1% was deemed a major advance. The Japanese component manufacturer supplying the Prius’s engine has delivered a power boost of more than 40%. Their manufacturing technology for the engine’s core electromagnetic steel plates leads the world.

The challenge of the depths



Manned Research Submersible SHINKAI 6500

Together with outer space, the ocean depths are one of our final frontiers. The Japan Agency for Marine-Earth Science and Technology (JAMSTEC) has developed the *Shinkai 6500*, a manned submersible capable of diving to 6,500 metres that has transported the world’s scientists to the ocean floors. *Shinkai 6500* made its 1,000th dive in March 2007, becoming the only manned submersible to have operated consistently at depths of more than 6,500 metres. The ocean floor is home to many hydrothermal vents. Issuing geothermally heated water, these fissures in the earth’s crust are home to creatures virtually unchanged from when life emerged on our planet about four billion years ago. Deep-sea research like the *Shinkai 6500*’s is starting to unlock the secrets of the birth of life.

©JAMSTEC



Marine life at a depth of 1,500m off Ishigaki Island (Okinawa, Japan)

©K. Yamane/JAMSTEC



©JAXA/ISAS

The frontier of outer space

Space technology is another arena in which Japan has been making remarkable progress. Itokawa is an asteroid only 600 metres in length, and is 300 million kilometres from earth. The asteroid explorer *Hayabusa* developed by Japan’s Institute of Space and Astronautical Science (ISAS, part of the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency, or JAXA) landed on it successfully in 2005. It has attempted to recover surface soil to bring back to Japan. If successful, this will be the first time since the Apollo missions that material from space, other than lunar soil, has been brought back to earth, creating a landmark in our history. Now on its return journey, *Hayabusa* is scheduled to land in 2010. JAXA has also launched the *Daichi* advanced land observation satellite. Part of the mission of this satellite is to map all the earth’s terrain in detail, and it is providing image data crucial for responding to major natural disasters.

Spacecraft *Hayabusa*



©JAXA/ISAS